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I Am Navy Medicine:Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Christopher Marsh

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After graduating from El Camino high school in Oceanside, California in 2004, I started college at the University of Nebraska with a major in advertising. While in college I was extremely busy taking classes, on the water polo team, and had somehow managed to start a career in advertising. My first year working in advertising felt personally and professionally unfulfilling as I had begun to take more of an interest in medicine.

While on break from school, my cousin, who was a Fleet Marine Force (FMF) Navy corpsman, talked to me about his experiences and opportunities in the Navy and convinced me to join in 2008. Shortly after I joined, my cousin told me he had been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for some time and now that I had some experience under my belt he felt more comfortable talking about it with me. This lesson in coping would become very important for me in my own journey serving as a FMF corpsman.

In my first six years, I was stationed with 1st Marine Division out of Twentynine Palms and Camp Pendleton, California completing two combat tours to Afghanistan during that time. In 2011, while in Afghanistan, I was shot in the arm during a fire-fight causing severe bone and nerve damage. I earned a Purple Heart for being wounded in action, but that injury meant eight surgeries and almost a year of occupational therapy. Instead of giving up on the Navy, I used this experience to push myself further. I also took a cue from my cousin and was open about my experiences to avoid any stress that could have inhibited my efforts to recover.



Hospital Corpsman 1st class Christopher Marsh receiving a gold medal at the 2012 Warrior Games for the 200m freestyle relay alongside LT Brad Snyder (Photo provided by Hospital Corpsman 1st class Christopher Marsh)

As part of my recovery I participated in the 2012 warrior games less than a year after my injury. I was part of the Navy/Coast Guard swim team and Lt. Brad Snyder, one of the best American Paralympic athletes of all time, was our team captain. Working on a team with Brad was truly inspirational; everything he said motivated us to work harder. We won gold that year which assured me that my journey with the Navy was not over.

After the warrior games I had an opportunity to go with 1st Marine Division to the Philippines on a Balikatan mission. Balikatan is a training exercise held since 1984, aimed at improving the ability of Philippine and U.S. military forces to work together during planning, contingency, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. There I was able to provide medical services in an area where many people had never seen a doctor or a medical provider. I met one woman there whose wrist was bandaged with leaves and said she had gone to a shaman who took the bad spirits out of it. She was nervous at first but she eventually allowed me to remove the makeshift bandage to see what I could do. I saw immediately that her wrist was broken. Had we not been there to provide care to her community it probably would have never healed.



Hospital Corpsman 1st class Christopher Marsh performing a primary assessment of a child in Legaspi, Philippines during Exercise Balikatan '14 (Photo provided by Hospital Corpsman 1st class Christopher Marsh)

I've experienced a lot in my eight years in the Navy, and now I'm using those experiences at the U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED), where I help determine what kinds of medical personnel we need in different situations, and who fits the bill. From working on the ground with Marines to swimming with one of the best American Paralympic athletes of all time at the Warrior Games, to providing care for those in need around the world, the Navy has truly been the most fulfilling experience of my life.

Navy Medicine has allowed me to figure out my passion, and has given me endless opportunities to pursue it. My name is Christopher Marsh, and I am Navy Medicine.

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